

(Abstract - Conference paper)

The Socio-Cultural Uplift of Humanity via the Religious Instructions and Guidance of Early Buddhism

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As one of the earliest of surviving world religions, Buddhism's unassailable position which it has come to claim and maintain lies in its anthropocentric approach both to **the ills to which the humans of the world are subject** and to the problem of their **total redemption** out of it **without reference to any higher divine power besides man**. Dating back to more than twenty five centuries of human history in the world, Buddhism explains the genesis of man via a philosophic causal analysis which virtually converges on those given by the modern biologists of today.

Defying the creationist theories of ancient India, which trace the origin of individual selves or *ātmans* to the cosmic *Brahman*, Buddhism offers the straightforward theory of **personal parental human origin of man** [*mātāpettika-sambhavo*], and places the unalterable responsibility for the ups and downs of each one's life on his or her own causally generated long range consciousness or *viññāṇa*, based on the theory of *karma*. This enables to holding every one in the world responsible, individually and collectively, for the experience they, along with others, are made to go through.

Thus social harmony and personal human well being in the world, both individual and collective, are traceable to moral goodness of man propounded in religion rather than to fear and submission to the will of a believed in divinity who **commands the will of pockets of chosen humanity to divine enslavement.**

Pañcasīla, at State level and in the hands of benevolent rulers, endeavours to achieve stability and prosperity in the land through the co-operation of the people. Moral goodness of people individually was looked up to as a key human well being. Down-to-earth fraternal love which must exist in the world among humans co-laterally cannot be allowed to be watered only through divine grace.

History bears witness to the fact that wherever material culture has **aggressively advanced** on the **basis of competitive division of ethnic groups** or **religious factions**, the results have invariably ended up in being ruinous and ravaging. Massive monuments of religious and ethnic cultures have, in the hands of religious fanatics, and ethno-supremacist exponents, been totally wiped out or reduced to mere shambles through, more or less, heaven sponsored rivalries. Even recent history in the Middle East have provided adequate proof of this.



(Conference Paper - Presentation Version)

The Socio-Cultural Uplift of Humanity via the Religious Instructions and Guidance of Early Buddhism

Before embarking on any critical or evaluative study of Buddhism today, it is of paramount importance to present an unambiguous picture as to what the teachings of Siddhārtha Gautama stood for. And that too, for the **total redemption** out of **the unhappiness** the world **brings upon mankind**. It is definitely declared

that this redemption is to be brought about by humans themselves and possibly **in this very life**.

Siddhartha **evolved a philosophy of life** out of what he saw of mankind around him [+ and not via a divine revelation]. Born among humans **without any divine mandate**, he acquired from within himself the ability to fulfil this mission. It was very naturally that he **built out of it a religious edifice** within which all life [of man and bird and beast] was secure, without any religious demands on any one for the flesh or blood of another.

Buddhism in brief is **a religion of gentle pacifist thinking**, with **an accompanying philosophy of love and care** for all life [*mettā* and *karuṇā*], without any wild or violent action for **the glorification of its adherents**. This requires of humans an **inestimable degree of ennobling self-surrender and renunciation**.

Renunciation in Buddhism is **reduction** [and **total elimination ultimately** at that], of the **gratification of the senses**, of the pursuit of pleasure, both physical and mental. It is the primary pre-requisite in terms of the religious philosophy of Buddhism. This comes in the wake of its **spiritually corrected value judgements**, prior to embarking on the journey for the attainment of the goal of Nirvana. This is nothing very strange for modern philosophical thinking.

It is a **gross misunderstanding and an equally malicious gross misrepresentation** to refer to Buddhism's teachings and its goal **as being other worldly**. The Buddha and a considerable number of his early disciples, both men and women, gained their salvation and enjoyed the bliss of Nirvana in their life time and lived here thereafter to enjoy it, as the Buddha himself did for forty-five years.

This indeed is the possibility of *jīvan mukti* in Buddhism or the **highest spiritual bliss** while **still living one's human life** as against *videha mukti* or **liberation after death** as promulgated by other Indian and later non-Indian theo-

centric religions where the highest spiritual happiness lies in being united, **after death**, with the transcendental divine source of life.

On the **gradually ascending way to Nirvana** in Buddhism [i.e. in the Noble Eight-fold Path], the very second item is *sammā saṅkappa* or **the correctly structured pattern of goal-oriented Buddhist thinking**. This is **legitimately derived** from the preceding one of *sammā-diṭṭhi*. *Sammādiṭṭhi* **initially opens the doors to the Buddhist way** of leading to Nirvana. It does not **merely make good men and women of world citizens** [*sammā-diṭṭhissa sammā-saṅkappo pahoti*. MN. III. 46.]. It is well and truly **a goal-oriented launching**, not very different from an unmanned satellite fired into outer space. This is from where a non-Buddhist turns out to be a Buddhist. Therefore *sammā-diṭṭhi* is said to be **leading to the Buddhist way of thinking** [*āgato imaṃ saddhammaṃ*], i.e. **opening the way to the development of wisdom**, not to wisdom itself.

If one approaches the total content of Buddhism, without isolating the religious from the spiritual, then one would realise that there is a very basic position in early Buddhism of clearly upholding an **inevitable culture of the human which is religious and down-to-earth** and **without which one cannot develop his spiritual and transcendental stature**. This phase of initial human culture is **enunciated under the category of morality or *sīla***. It is both individualist and collectivist in its ideology, serving both the individual and the community.

According to Buddhism, human life is of parental origin [*mātā-pettika-sambhavo*], by way of the union of the sperm and ova provided by the mother and the father for the production of the zygote. Buddhist teachings clearly indicate the genesis and the continuance of the life of humans [from one life span to another] on the basis of the Law of Causation or Causal Genesis, i.e. the *paṭicca-samuppāda*.

We also need to add here with sufficient stress that the movement of this *paṭicca-samuppāda* or Causal Genesis Process is not circular, i.e. comparable to

a circle where the end meets and joins the original starting point. The *paṭicca-samuppāda* has a **continuous linear on-going forward movement**. At the relevant point in the chain, during one's life time, **when life terminates in death**, the life-process starts again **with a new birth** in a **new life form**. This is how the Suttas explain the term *jāti* in this chain, i.e. that it **is birth in a new form of life** [DN.II.305 ; MN. III.249].

It must also be remembered that according to Buddhist teachings, **life stretches through a trans-*samsāric* dimension**, i.e. **through death to birth again and again**, [through time and space] until the process is terminated in Nirvana **through conscious and deliberate striving** when **there shall be no more re-emergence** thereafter **of the Life-carrier Consciousness** [*viññāṇassa nirodheṇa etth'etaṃ uparujjhati* at Kevaḍḍha Sutta - DN. I. 223].

We consider that this analysis we have made so far with regard to the genesis and continuance of human life **through this massive process** termed *samsāra* and the **individual liberation of humans** out of it **through personal self-correction**, is of primary importance for **a correct evaluation of both the down-to-earth religious** and the **transcendental spiritual dimensions of Buddhism**.

Let us begin with Buddhism's primary societal consideration of healthy interpersonal relations in the human community. It shuts out all external factors of grace from the Divine [*attāṇo loko*] which places the humans in a low position of subordination and submissiveness. Nor does it entertain any ideas of a Divine Controller of human affairs [*anabhissaro*. See *cattāro dhammuddesā* at MN. II. 68].

This is a world view which includes within it all members of society, irrespective of gender, caste and creed and religious differences. It is this resultant concept of equality which Buddhism bestows on all mankind which alone could justifiably divide them on the basis of **moral goodness** or **wholesomeness of human behaviour**. Anything else may be viewed as mere

descriptive factors without any socially or morally justifiable value basis.

This **invariable foundation of wholesome Buddhist life** is called *sīla*. It is moral goodness and is applicable in the life of mankind, any where, any time. This is within the purview of **what we would call religion in Buddhism**. It should hardly have **any tinge of exclusiveness**. It is both valid and valuable among mankind, who alone, barring animals, and irrespective of regional differences, are capable of acting on the basis of sound judgement.

Consider this spiritual elevation or growth pattern of humans in Buddhism which stands in marked contrast to the *varṇāśrama dharma* of Hinduism which bestows on mankind **socio-religious gradations of their own construction** as 'Brahmin was born out of Brahma's mouth and so was Ksatriya out of his hands' [*Brāhmaṇo 'sya mukhaṃ āsīt bāhor rājanyaḥ kṛtaḥ*].

Born and bred in India which was essentially Hindu in its cultural background, Sri Jawahar Lal Nehru, the renowned Prime Minister of India, has to say this about **the cultural impact of Buddhism on India**. Here is Sri Nehru in his classic, the **Discovery of India**: " In India, one of the consequences of this **was the growth of vegetarianism** and **abstention from alcoholic drinks**. Till then both Brahmins and *Ksatriyas* often ate meat and took wine. Animal sacrifice was forbidden. " [p.105].

Garbed in what one may choose to call myth or legend, the theme of the Cakkavatti King [DN. II. 173f. Also DN. III. 61] puts forward the *pañca-sīla* as the **universal ethic of good living** for all and sundry, living anywhere in the four quarters of the earth. Respect for all forms of life, respect for others' legitimately earned possessions, mutual respect for the genders, particularly of the males towards the females, honesty in word and deed in all social transactions and finally, abstention from the use of drugs and alcohol to safeguard one's sanity of judgement.

If these modes of good and civilised behaviour are strictly enforced by the rulers, be they men or women, and are adhered to and are not violated by the people, the Universal Monarch then assures them that there is no more need to alter the political structure of their governments [*yathā-bhuttañca bhujjatha*]. Party politics, whether of the east or the west, today are of no more worth than being mere bleached bones of contention, merely for the sake of disagreement.

In view of the evils that devolve on human society in the breach of any one of them, irrespective of regional or denominational differences, Buddhist teachings look upon their violation as sources of dread and fear upon mankind [*pañca-bhayāni* AN. III. 204]. **Sheltered at times behind their own doctrinaire teachings**, some creeds which lay claims to **very special historical** and **ethnic origins**, are seen today **even to sanction the killing of fellow humans** whom they brand **as non-believers or infidels**.

This manner of inhumanly harsh behaviour among humans, under the sanction of religion, is seen both being glorified as well as actually taking place even in the twenty-first century world today. Buddhism which came into existence five hundred years before the Christian era looks upon such one-sided activities in the name of religion **as being both brutal and bestial**. Such acts, bereft of a true concept of down-to-earth love, of humans towards humans, are inimical to society and to the very concept of human. They are therefore called *pañca verāni*, i.e. five-fold **self-nurtured, self-corrosive hostilities** or patterns of **antagonism against society**. One who indulges in them is called a **social villain** or **one who lacks healthy inter-personal relationships** [*appahāya pañca verāni dussīlo iti vuccati*. AN. III. 205]. This expression of opinion and this line of action is discovered in Buddhism well before war criminals being judged today by international courts.

Thus the extent to which Buddhism **as a living social philosophy** endeavours **to consolidate** and **fortify** the very **basis of social harmony** and development in

the very life we live here **as a prelude to its spiritual ascent** becomes adequately clear. Basic love of humans towards humans must necessarily be co-lateral and **does not need to be filtered through the agency of a divine filtering network.**

This man-to-man or human-to-human binding relationship [in the world we live in, and not in a place we plan to go to after death], we openly call **the state of basic friendliness of human to human** or *maitrī*. Humans are **not a block of hired labour here on earth to build a kingdom for a God above.** These hyper-religious loyalties are preached and propagated by **entrenched earthbound-global-power-seekers, stretching out for world domination,** picturing them out to their credulous congregations as something **believed to be divinely ordained** and derived.

Pañca-sīla, in commencing its socio-ethical consolidation of the human community, by fostering better relations among themselves is not propelled by any **expansionist policy of empire builders.** In the face of recent events which flared up at global level, with wars and threats of wars of total annihilation, and with strange alliances of far flung power groups, nothing but massacre of mankind seemed predictable.

The United Nations did seem to move somewhat in this direction after the world war II in formulating their Fundamental Human Rights. But even they inevitably showed that they could be crushed under the mighty heel of overwhelming power blocks.

Suttas like the Sāleyyaka and Verañjaka [MN. I. 285 ff.] provide enough evidence that even pleasure loving people too who lived a life of affluence requested the Buddha for a recipe for good living, with a guarantee of blissful lives hereafter. The Buddha had in hand a ready-made offer to give them. It was the down-to-earth good life of humans as humans, i.e. ***dhamma-cariyā*** and ***sama-cariyā***, causing no grief to another as against ***adhamma-cariyā*** and ***visama-cariyā***. In it there was not even a veiled submission to any divinity, personal or impersonal in search of happiness as a reward in a life after. This

meant **exaltation of human conduct to its peak of perfection**, this down-to-earth **perfection being called divine**. Hence the inalienably divine Buddhist concept of *Brahma-vihāra*, the living mode of unspecified universal love [*mettā*] and care / compassion [*karuṇā*], and appreciative joy in the success and well being of others [*muditā*].

In terms of Buddhist ethical thinking and accompanying living, one shall primarily avoid trading in human life such as slaves for labour, or women for prostitution, animals for experiments and animals for human consumption etc. One shall not sell even meat, drugs or alcohol. Weapons of destruction, together with poison, are equally banned. Whatever be the reason, the world today is gaining some sensitivity in this direction. Every one of the complainants who were vociferous in the open during recent world conflicts, have been seriously guilty of the crime at some stage or another in secrecy: of supplying **weapons of mass destruction** to would be murderers This applies equally well to individuals as well as nations, whether the high potent articles traded in are called dirty bombs or suit-case bombs, in this part of the world or in that.



(Conference paper - Major Unabridged version)

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Before embarking on any critical or evaluative study of Buddhism today in the twenty-first century, we consider it to be of paramount importance to present

to any audience anywhere an unambiguous and clear picture as to what Buddhist teachings of Siddhārtha Gautama stood and stand for and also as to what its founder wished to establish on earth here for the long range benefits of mankind. That too, in terms of the life lived here in this world as well as **for the total redemption out of the unhappiness the world brings upon mankind**. This redemption, it is definitely declared, may be brought about by any zealous and energetic disciple, irrespective of gender [*ātāpī nipako bhikkhu*], **by man or woman**, by himself or herself, **in this very life**, depending on the degree and intensity of his or her application to the way of life propounded.

Siddhartha **evolved a philosophy of life** out of what he saw of mankind around him. He was born among humans, without any divine or heavenly assignments. He realised that he was therefore duty bound as a mortal to relieve mankind of the stresses and strains in which they are caught up. He acquired from within himself the ability to fulfil this mission, [*sayam abhiññāya*]. It was very naturally that he **built out of it a religious edifice** within which all life was secure, without any religious demands on any one for the flesh or blood of another.

This we need to emphasise, in view of the history of subsequent world religions which came long afterwards. Buddhism in brief is **a religion of gentle pacifist thinking**, with **an accompanying philosophy of love and care** [*mettā* and *karuṇā*], without any wild or violent action for the glorification of its adherents or for the appeasement of any all powerful agency perched outside man. This courageously declared position requires of humans an inestimable degree of ennobling self-surrender and renunciation.

Renunciation in Buddhism [i.e. *nekkhamma* or **reduction**, and **total elimination ultimately**, of the **gratification of the senses**, namely *kāma-saṃkappa*], both physical and mental, is the primary pre-requisite in terms of the religious philosophy of Buddhism. This comes in the wake of *sammā-ditṭhi* or spiritually corrected vision or value judgements], prior to embarking on the journey for the

attainment and achievement of the goal of Nibbāna. This being so, one could naturally be puzzled at the very concept we take up here of a **socio-cultural uplift of humanity** via Buddhism. One could argue that such a concept is no more than a mere mundane aspiration. We maintain that the two, the mundane and the transcendental, in the life of a Buddhist are reciprocally connected and mutually inter-active.

It is a **gross misunderstanding** and **an equally malicious gross miscalculation to refer to Buddhism's teachings and its goal as being other worldly**. It is indeed a transcendental achievement which could well and truly be gained here and now, in this very life [*diṭṭhe 'va dhamme*]. The Buddha and a considerable number of his early disciples, both men and women, gained their salvation and enjoyed the bliss of Nibbāna [*vimutti-sukha*] in their life time and lived here thereafter to enjoy it, as the Buddha himself did for forty-five years.

This indeed is the possibility of *jīvan mukti* or the **highest spiritual bliss while still living one's human life** as against *videha mukti* or **liberation after death** as promulgated by other Indian and later non-Indian theo-centric religions where the highest spiritual happiness lies in being united, **after death**, with the ultimate source of origin of life as in *sa-lokatā, sa-ātmātā* etc. [i.e. *Brahman* in Indian religions and God in the theo-centric Judeo-Christian traditions].

The very second item on the **gradually ascending way to Nibbāna** in Buddhism [i.e. in the Noble Eight-fold Path or *Ariyo Aṭṭhaṅgiko Maggo*] is *sammā saṅkappa* or the correctly structured patterns of goal-oriented Buddhist thinking. This **is legitimately derived** from the preceding one of *sammā-diṭṭhi*. *Sammādiṭṭhi* **initially opens the doors to the Buddhist way** of leading to Nibbana. It does not merely make good men and women of world citizens [*sammā-diṭṭhissa sammā-saṅkappo pahoti*. See Mahācattārīsaka Sutta at MN. III. 46.]. It is well and truly a goal-oriented launching, not very different from an unmanned satellite fired into outer space. This same idea of **successive development** on the path is also

found at Janavasabha Sutta - DN. II. 217].

Sammā-dit̥ṭhi in this context, it is to be remembered, is by no means wisdom which is referred to as *paññā*. It is only the gradually acquired corrected vision in the Buddhist way, through instruction from another [*parato ghoso*] and one's own correct reflective thinking [*yoniso ca manasikāro*. See Mahāvedalla Sutta at MN. I. 294]. Therefore *sammā-dit̥ṭhi* is said to be **leading to the Buddhist way of thinking** [*āgato imaṃ saddhammaṃ*], i.e. **opening the way to the development of wisdom**.

One has here to point out immediately that in early Buddhist thinking, there is neither the presence of a benevolent Buddha like **Amida** [more precisely **Amitābhah** and **Amitāyuh**], nor a magnanimous creator like *Īśvara* [who at times could even turn vindictive and revengeful as the need be], who should hold himself responsible for the physical and mental well being of his creation, exercising his power of saving grace and mercy upon them [*dhātuḥ prasādāt̥*]. He needs necessarily to lend a hand in the liberation of those whom he has created.

One should not fail here at this stage to remember the process of stratification of Buddhist thinking through the centuries, accommodating within it several strands of clearly polarised divergent themes. This approach should be part of honest historical study of religions. **Deviant views of later schools** should not be **smuggled into the mainstream teachings of the earlier ones** for the purpose of gaining overall approval and acceptance. If one approaches the total content of Buddhism, without isolating the religious from the spiritual, then one would realise that there is a very basic position in early Buddhism of clearly upholding an **inevitable culture of the human which is religious and down-to-earth** and **without which one cannot develop his spiritual and transcendental stature**. This phase of initial human culture **is enunciated under the category of morality or *sīla***. It is both individualist and collectivist in its ideology, serving both the individual and the community.

According to Buddhism, human life [this being our main concern here] is of

parental origin [*mātā-pettika-sambhavo*], by way of the union of the sperm and ova provided by the mother and the father [by the mother during her proper season] for the production of the zygote. Buddhist teachings clearly indicate the genesis and the continuance of the life of humans [from one life span to another] on the basis of the Law of Causation or Causal Genesis i.e. the *paṭicca-samuppāda*.

We also need to add here with sufficient stress that the movement of this *paṭicca-samuppāda* is not circular, i.e. comparable to a circle where the end meets and joins the original starting point. The *paṭicca-samuppāda* has a **continuous linear on- going forward movement**. At the relevant point in the chain, during one's life time, when life terminates in death, the life-process starts again **with a new birth in a new life form**. This is how the Suttas explain the term *jāti* in this chain, i.e. that it **is birth in a new form of life** [See Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta at DN. II. 305 *Katamā ca bhikkhave jāti. Yā tesam tesam sattānam tamhi tamhi sattanikāye jāti sañjāti okkanti abhinibbatti khandhānam pātubhāvo āyatanānam paṭilābho. Ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhave jāti*. See also Saccavibhaṅga Sutta at MN.III. 249 for this identical definition.]. These statements clearly indicate that *jāti* in the *Paṭiccasamuppāda* Chain was by no means viewed as a new birth [of anything whatsoever] within one's own *pañcakkhandha*. The life of humans being a **recurrent round of events** again and again in the same pattern, *Paṭiccasamuppāda* is best referred to as cyclical and not circular.

It operates essentially **on the basis of down-to-earth personal human responsibility** via self-regeneration as *taṇhā > upādāna > bhava > jāti*. According to Buddhism, it is the **unbridled yielding to the gratification of sensory stimuli** of the world we live in that adds fuel to the increasing demand for life continuance. This subtle but veiled psychic process [veiled even to oneself] is called *upādāna* or grasping for life which builds up a credit balance called life continuance or *bhava*. Once that is available, standing to the credit of oneself, one needs to necessarily manifest oneself as a form of life. And this we call birth or *jāti*.

It must also be remembered that according to Buddhist teachings, **life stretches through a trans-samsāric dimension**, i.e. **through death to birth again and again**, [through time and space] until the process is terminated in Nibbāna **through conscious deliberate striving** when **there shall be no more re-emergence thereafter of the Life-carrier Consciousness** [*viññāṇassa nirodhena etth'etaṃ uparujjhati* at Kevaḍḍha Sutta - DN. I. 223].

It adds further that for the successful fruition of the zygote [or *nāmarūpa* lodged within the womb of the mother] **to become real life therein**, its complementary factor of **the life potential of a being to be born** [i.e. one who is still rolling on in Samsāra, held within the grip of *upādāna* and *bhava*] must arrive on the scene. The Pali texts refer to the Buddha as emphatically declaring to Sāti that this Trans-samsāric Consciousness is conditionally generated [*paṭiccasamuppanna* at MN. I. 256. It is not an unchanging self-same soul, i.e. *tadev 'idaṃ viññāṇaṃ anaññaṇaṃ* ' t].

It is also referred to in the Sampasādaniya Sutta as the **Flowing Stream of Consciousness** [i.e. the **life supporting Consciousness** flowing across *Samsāra* or *viññāṇa-sota* at DN. III. 105] and also as having a continuity and connection at both ends [*ubhayato abbhocchinnaṃ*] in not being severed, i.e. from the past life to this from this life to the future, in the life to come. There is also a reference in the Ānañjasappāya Sutta to a **Rolling on Consciousness** or *samvattanika viññāṇa* [at MN. II. 263 f.] which possibly moves across, relative to the degree of one's spiritual development, from one plane of existence to another, **while still being not fully liberated**. The Mahānidāna Sutta at DN. II. 63 refers to it simply as *viññāṇa* .

It is undoubtedly this third factor of Trans-samsāric Consciousness [which is besides the contribution of the parents] whose arrival in the mother's womb which is declared to be essential for successful conception [possibly identifiable with the concept of implanting]. This journeying on **of the life potential from death to re-birth, and to death and birth again and again** to regenerate new life in

Samsāra is referred to as *gandhabbo ca paccupaṭṭhito hoti* in the Mahātaṇhāsankhaya Sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya [MN. I.265]. In all instances, the regeneration of human life [*gabbhassa avakkanti* or fertilisation of the embryo] is viewed as a self operative process, with each one responsible for his or her own genesis. Therefore according to Buddhism, humans do not inherit at birth any privileges or preferential treatment in terms of birth [*na jaccā vasalo hoti na jaccā hoti brāhmaṇo* - Sn. v. 136], in the hands of a Supreme Divinity or Creator God.

A likeness or a parallel to this idea is possibly seen when some modern western scientists refer to **the mind of the unborn child in the mother's womb** as being **pre-monitored**. They equally well maintain that neither heredity nor the environment has anything to do with this. Once born into life in this world [and while still being within the mother's womb] it is one's behavioural pattern, influenced partially by **inherited leanings from one's previous existences** [i.e. *āsaya* and *anusaya: anuset'ev 'assa kāmarāgānusayo* .. MN. I. 433] alone which elevates or degrades humans in society [*kammanā vasalo hoti kammanā hoti brāhmaṇo* Ibid.].

We consider that this analysis we have made so far with regard to the genesis and continuance of human life through this massive process termed *samsāra* and the individual liberation of humans out of it through personal self-correction, is of primary importance for a correct evaluation of both the down-to-earth religious and transcendental spiritual dimensions of Buddhism.

Let us now begin with Buddhism's primary societal consideration of healthy inter-personal relations in the human community. It shuts out all external factors of grace from the Divine [*attāṇo loko*] which places the humans in a low position of subordination and submissiveness. Nor does it entertain any ideas of a divine controller of human affairs [*anabhissaro*]. Both these negative items are listed among the vital ingredients of Buddhism as a whole [See *cattāro dhammuddesā*

at MN. II. 68]. This is a world view which includes within it all members of society, irrespective of gender, caste and creed differences. It is this resultant concept of equality [or *egalite*] which Buddhism bestows on all mankind which alone could justifiably divide them on the basis of moral goodness or wholesomeness of behaviour. Anything else may be viewed as mere descriptive factors without any justifiable evaluative basis.

This invariable foundation of wholesome Buddhist life is called *sīla*. It is moral goodness and is applicable in the life of mankind, any where, any time. It knows of no pettiness or partisan loyalties. Its universal applicability seems hardly questionable. This is within the purview of **what we would call religion in Buddhism**. It hardly has any tinge of exclusiveness. It is both valid and valuable among mankind, irrespective of regional differences. Neither divine nor human authorities are to classify humans as being of higher and lower grades, or to be under submission to the authority of another who is deemed higher in terms of divine mandates or social conventions. Consider this spiritual elevation or growth pattern in Buddhism which stands in marked contrast to the *varṇāśrama dharma* of Hinduism.

We do not need any experts in Sociology to tell us that any breakdown of the moral order in society leads to untold misery among its membership. Tension in the society and the stress and strain to which its membership is driven to in such situations needs no special mention. Buddhism has carefully formulated under five comprehensive headings these safeguards and presented them as the *pañca-sīla*. We only need to study a few areas where the applicability of this *pañca-sīla* is specifically laid down.

Garbed in what one may choose to call myth or legend, the theme of the Cakkavatti King [DN. II. 173f. Also DN. III. 61] puts forward the *pañca-sīla* as the **universal ethic of good living** for all and sundry, living anywhere in the four quarters of the earth. Respect for all forms of life, respect for others' legitimately

earned possessions, mutual respect for the genders, particularly of the males towards the females, honesty in word and deed and finally, abstention from drugs and alcohol to safeguard one's sanity of judgement.

The Universal Monarch, according to the legend, recommends these to the provincial rulers who come to him seeking his advice as to the best modes of justifiable good governance. If these modes of good and civilised behaviour are strictly enforced by the rulers, men or women, and are adhered to and are not violated by the people, the Universal Monarch assures them that there is no more need to alter the political structure of their governments [*yathā-bhuttañca bhujjatha*]. Party politics, whether of the east or the west, are today of no more worth than bleached bones of contention.

In view of the evils that devolve on human society in the breach of any one of them, irrespective of regional or denominational differences, Buddhist teachings look upon their violation as sources of dread and fear upon mankind [*pañca-bhayāni*]. **Sheltered at times behind their own doctrinaire teachings**, some creeds which lay claims to very special historical and ethnic origins, are seen today **even to sanction the killing of fellow humans whom they brand as non-believers or infidels**. Among them, even the murder of those within their own group [specially women] who bring discredit to their families through the infringement of their conventional levels of social rectitude like caste creed considerations of propriety in marriage is justified.

This manner of inhumanly harsh behaviour among humans, under the sanction of religion, is seen both being glorified as well as actually taking place even in the twenty-first century world today. Buddhism which came into existence five hundred years before the Christian era looks upon such one-sided activities in the name of religion as being both brutal and bestial. Such acts, bereft of a true concept of down-to-earth love, of humans towards humans, are inimical to society and to the very concept of human. They are therefore called *pañca*

verāni, i.e. five-fold self-nurtured hostilities or patterns of antagonism against society. One who indulges in them is called a **social villain** or one who lacks healthy inter-personal relationships [*appahāya pañca verāni dussīlo iti vuccatī*]. In terms of Buddhist teachings, such a person is said to be destined to damnation [*nirayaṃ so upapajjati*] in his life after death.

Thus the extent to which Buddhism as a living social philosophy endeavours to consolidate and fortify the very basis of social harmony and development in the very life we live here as a prelude to its spiritual ascent becomes adequately clear. Love amidst the human community, if it does attempt to lay any claim to even a passing phase of divine associations, has to rise well above murderous group loyalties, which are said to be religiously sanctioned and popularised. Basic love of humans towards humans must necessarily be co-lateral and does not need to be filtered through the agency of a divine filtering network. Nor does it need any approval of a creator of one's own choice. Such partisan and even criminal notions are unacceptable even among civilised humans. This man-to-man or human-to-human binding relationship [in the world we live in, and not in a place we plan to go to after death], we openly call **the state of basic friendliness of human to human** or *maitrī*. We do not need to turn heavenward to gain any backing for this. Humans need to possess it while they are human and because they are human and to nurture it within themselves. Humans are not a block of hired labour to build a kingdom for a God above.

We must make it operate here down to earth, without believing in any pressure or persuasion from elsewhere. History shows us all the time that all ill-directed feelings by any group of humans towards another group, denominationally or regionally, on grounds of different religious beliefs or ethnic identities seem all the time to lead to a point of massacre and annihilation. These must be viewed by all sensible religions as well as by social scientists as being nothing other than religious insanity or genocidal fanaticism. These are preached and propagated by entrenched earthbound global power seekers, stretching out

for world domination, picturing out to their credulous congregations as something believed to be divinely ordained and derived.

Pañca-sīla, in commencing its socio-ethical consolidation of the human community, by fostering better relations among themselves, for very down to earth purposes of peace on earth and goodwill among men, achieves this with incredible ease and cost to none. It is not propelled by any expansionist policy of empire builders. Underlying it there lie no threats or commands, visible or concealed. Its purpose is achieved, if led by honest leadership, much more effectively than one could hope for, with no blood shed and no lives destroyed, of the **friend** or the **foe**. Recent events flared up at global level, with wars and threats of wars of total annihilation, and with strange alliances of far flung power groups, nothing but massacre of mankind seemed predictable.

On other hand, if we dispassionately lean back and take a look again at what we have said so far about the mundane and down-to-earth benefits that accrue to the human community as a result of the respectful observance of the injunctions of the *pañcasīla*, we are reminded that it provides a genuine guarantee against social degeneration of humans in this very life, here and now. The United Nations did seem to move somewhat in this direction after the world war II in formulating their Fundamental Human Rights. But even they inevitably showed that they could be crushed under the mighty heel of overwhelming power blocks.

The Dhammapada, in its verses 246 & 247, refers to the decline humans bring upon themselves **as digging at their very root**: *mūlaṃ khaṇati attano*. Here the stress is on the individual. Elsewhere the collectivist role of the state on the correction of the people of the land by providing the right atmosphere of good living is more than stressed. Of these, special stress seems to be laid with regard to proneness to sex and addiction to alcohol [*itthidhutto surādhutto* and *itthisoṇḍiṃ vikiraṇiṃ*] in the Parābhava Sutta at verses 106 and 112 of the

Suttanipāta. The Sigāla Sutta makes special mention of six evil consequences of addiction to alcohol [DN. III. 182 f.] and lists draining away of one's economic resources in this very life [*sanditthikā dhanajāni*]. In passing, let us mention that the Buddhists of Afghanistan had known this injunction, [specially its area of consequent social impropriety] together with its Commentarial explanations as far back as 200 A.D. A stone carving from Hadda delineating this theme is preserved in the Muse Guimet in Paris even today.

During the Buddha's life time itself, Buddhism gained wide acceptance in many of the larger kingdoms of North India. Kingdoms like Anga, Magadha and Kosala seem to have extended to the Buddha as a renowned religious leader their unstinted support. Both literary evidence of the Pali texts and extant archaeological remains lend support to this belief. Suttas like the Sāleyyaka and Verañjaka [MN. I. 285 ff.] provide enough evidence that pleasure loving people too who lived a life of affluence requested the Buddha for a recipe for good living, with a guarantee of blissful lives hereafter.

The Buddha had in hand a ready-made offer to give them. It was the down-to-earth good life of humans as humans, i.e. *dhamma-cariyā* and *sama-cariyā*, causing no grief to another as against *adhamma-cariyā* and *visama-cariyā*. In it there was not even a veiled submission to any divinity, personal or impersonal in search of happiness as a reward. It was emphatically indicated that it was the good living of humans that brought happiness as its invariable reward. This meant exaltation of human conduct to its peak of perfection, this down-to-earth perfection being called divine. Hence the inalienably divine Buddhist concept of *Brahma-vihāra*, the living mode of unspecified universal love [*mettā*] and care / compassion [*karuṇā*], and appreciative joy in the success of others [*muditā*].

As Buddhism guides its adherents along its Noble Eight fold Path of graduation in the direction of Nibbāna, it lays special emphasis on the mode of living whereby people earn, as it were, their daily bread. The so-called basis or

means of living [referred to in Buddhist literature as *bhoga*] is earned not through prayer but by the sweat of one's brow [*sedāvakkhittehi*]. Buddhists make no prayer for their daily bread. It has to be earned by them, and that by means which are reasonably fair [*dhammikehi dhamma-laddhehi bhogehi*]. The process whereby one does this is called *sammā ājīva*.

One shall primarily avoid trading in life such as slaves for labour, or women for prostitution, animals for experiments and animals for human consumption etc. One shall not sell even meat, drugs or alcohol. Weapons of destruction are equally banned. Whatever be the reason, the world today is gaining some sensitivity in this direction. Every one of the complainants who are vociferous in the open have been seriously guilty of the crime at some stage or another in secrecy. This applies equally well to individuals as well as nations, whether the articles traded in are called dirty bombs or suit-case bombs, in this part of the world or that.

